

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

April 21, 2005

The Honorable Gale A. Norton
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Room 7214
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Madam Secretary:

I am writing to follow up on my March 17 letter on the fate of nearly four-million acres off the coast of Florida now under federal protection from oil and gas drilling.

I'm surprised you haven't responded directly, and that your staff seems to feel it would be a waste of our time to discuss the issue before you make your decision. I did speak briefly today with the nominee to be your deputy secretary; and, she has agreed to meet with me next week.

The issue at hand remains continuing to protect from drilling the 3.93-million acres in an area known as Lease Sale 181, a 72-mile-wide tract 213 miles off Tampa Bay and 100 miles south of Pensacola.

This is the same area you protected until 2007 in your last five-year plan. But in your recent letter to Sen. Mel Martinez, you pledged not to allow drilling in Florida waters within 100 miles of the coast - leaving open the question of whether it will be permitted in areas beyond, particularly in the protected section of tract 181.

As you know, I am in lockstep on this issue with Gov. Jeb Bush, who vowed in 2001 that "there will be no new drilling in the Lease Sale 181 area off the coast of Florida under [his] watch."

I look forward to your immediate response. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Nelson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.